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ABSTRACT

In response to an eighth grade girl's questions about selecting a newspaper career, this pamphlet provides information on a number of aspects of the newspaper industry from a publisher's personal point of view. Educational requirements are discussed, emphasizing the necessity of a 4-year college degree in journalism or a related field and a solid grasp of the English language, and other helpful skills are described, such as knowing how to type and use microcomputers. Following a brief description of the chief executive officer's role at the newspaper, newspaper jobs in the following areas are outlined: reporting, editing, accounting, advertising, circulation, employee relations, marketing/promotion, and production. A separate section details the function and characteristics of the reporter. Finally, the monetary opportunities available in the newspaper industry are described, emphasizing that news reporting is not particularly rewarding in the financial sense but can provide many intangible rewards. (JD)

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David J. Mack
President/Publisher

Press & Sun-Bulletin

A 13-year-old 8th grader from Endicott recently wrote to Publisher David Mack to say she is searching for a career and is considering being a newspaper reporter. She asked him to answer some of her questions. His response follows.

Dear Kellie,

I'm delighted to hear that you're considering a career as a newspaper reporter. I enjoyed reading about your ambitions, and I'm happy to share with you some of my thoughts about our business.

Let me try to answer the questions you asked, and maybe deal briefly with some you didn't ask.

What kind of education do you need to be in the newspaper business?

If you want to be a reporter or an editor, plan now to get a four-year college degree. It needn't be in journalism; mine isn't. It can be in English, like mine, or in history, or economics or political science, or more specialized fields.

You should start now, if you haven't already, to pay a great deal of attention to the English language. For my newsroom, I want people who are perfect spellers, who know how to punctuate properly, and who can write clear, simple sentences that follow grammar...the rules of the language...precisely.

It would help, too, if you know how to type well, and if you understand small computers. Just about all our writing and editing is done on computer terminals. You need to know arithmetic, too, so you can figure out the numbers that often are part of a news story.

What do you do when you run a newspaper?

As a publisher, I'm the chief executive officer of the newspaper. I am ultimately responsible for seeing to it that all the departments of the newspaper communicate well with one another to produce the best newspaper possible.

I take part in the editorial board, a group of 10 people who decide what positions and opinions the newspaper will have on its editorial page. Previously, I was the managing editor, which meant deciding which stories and pictures get in the newspaper every day, placing them according to their importance in the paper, and being sure those stories are accurate, complete, well organized and in good English.

What kinds of jobs does a newspaper offer?

In a newsroom, jobs are divided into two main groups...reporters and editors. Reporters are people who go out into the community, find out the facts behind interesting stories, and write those stories to go in the newspaper.

Editors are people who read those stories, check them to make sure they are complete and well-organized, fair and balanced, accurate, and that they use good English and punctuation. Editors also "lay out" pages...decide what pictures and stories go on which pages, in which positions. They also do the all-important, and difficult, job of writing headlines for stories.

People usually are reporters before they become editors, because it's important for an editor to know what a reporter is up against. And some people - often the very best - choose to remain reporters all their lives.

News departments also need photographers, artists, secretaries, librarians and clerks.

Other departments of the newspaper are:

Accounting--this is the business office, which takes care of the money we take in and pays our bills.

Advertising--these people sell advertisements to customers who want to use our paper to tell the public about goods and services they have for sale.

Advertising is how newspapers make most of their money.

Circulation--these are the people who are responsible for selling the newspaper, through newsstands, coin-operated racks, newspaper carriers and motor route drivers.

Employee Relations--this department oversees our wages and salaries and fringe benefits for employees.

Marketing/Promotion--this department figures out the best ways to sell our ads and the newspaper as a whole, and does research on our community and what the community is interested in.

Production--people in this department do the mechanical jobs that produce the newspaper, from putting the type on master pages to running the presses and the mailroom machinery that gets the newspaper out the door, on its way to you.

What does a reporter do?

Being a newsman or woman isn't like a lot of other jobs you're going to hear about as you explore the working world. Instead of learning how to handle sophisticated equipment or studying lots of specialized information, like doctors or lawyers do, newspaper people have to learn about life. And that means learning about, and caring about, people.

A good newsperson is someone who's always curious...always wants to know what's over the next ridge, or what's going on behind closed doors.

That curiosity leads to a fascination with how things work. Just as you can see how a wristwatch works if you take off the back and look at the parts inside, newspaper people want to find out what makes governments and schools, businesses and people, do the things they all do.

Their curiosity leads them to have logical minds, to look for the natural order of things.

In a series of events, they can figure out which had to come first, and second, and third, and so on, and they can figure out which is the most important. Then, when they write their stories, they start with the most important thing, then go the next most important, and so on.

Curiosity also makes them interested in history and in all the things in the world they don't know anything about. And how do they learn about all those things?

They read. The best newspeople I know are always reading something...a book, a magazine, another newspaper...even the back of the cereal box at the breakfast table (after they finish reading the Press & Sun-Bulletin, of course)!

Good newspeople care deeply for the truth. They never lie. They know that people depend on them to tell the truth, and that if they're ever caught lying, people might not believe them the next time.

You need to be strong to work in news. It takes stamina. You have to be able to work long hours...in some cases, around the clock without sleep...and still keep yourself alert and mentally sharp.

You need to be dedicated. That's easy, when you love your work, but if you want a job that starts at nine in the morning and ends at five in the afternoon every day, forget about newspapers. I average about 75 hours a week at my job.

And maybe most important of all, good news people care a great deal about other people.

They like working with people; teamwork is very important. They like finding out about people, by talking to people.

Their biggest reason for working as hard as they do is to give the people who read their paper information that these readers can use to make their lives better.

What kind of money do you earn?

Nobody gets rich working for newspapers, but the latest figures show that jobs in news continue to pay better than average in America.

In a nationwide survey of newspapers of all different sizes in mid-1985, this was found:

---22% of newspaper people, compared to 26% of the general public, earn \$15,000-\$25,000.

—25% of newspaper people, compared to 17% of the general public, make \$25,000-\$35,000.

—22% of newspaper people, compared to 11% of the general public, make \$35,000-\$50,000.

—17% of newspaper people, compared to five percent of the public, makes \$50,000 to \$75,000.

And at the top, four percent of newspaper people, compared with two percent of the public, earns more than \$75,000.

If your ambition is to make a lot of money, you probably won't do it in the newsroom. Most of the highest paid newspaper people are publishers, not editors.

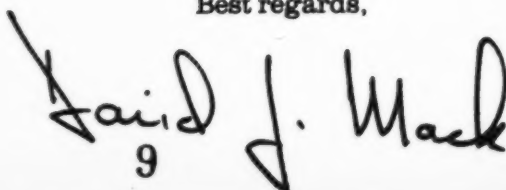
But most of us aren't in it for the money. We're in it for the intangible rewards, the ones you can't see, but you can feel. One reward is the fun of having a job that's never the same two days in a row, in which you deal with every kind of person you can imagine.

The other big one is the good feeling you get from knowing that every day, if you've done your job well, you've helped to make the world and your community a little bit better place to live.

I hope this answers your questions.

Thanks for thinking about a career in news. I hope I see your "byline" in our newspaper someday!

Best regards,


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